

MahāShivrātri & Rishi Bodh Mahotsav

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Rishi Bodh is celebrated to mark the events in the life of young Mool Shankar leading to his enlightenment (*bodh*) or the illumination of the intellect - the subtle faculty of the physical body. He left the well-to-do parental home, led the life of an ascetic (*sannyāsa*) as Svāmī Dayānand Saraswatī.

He was not the first person nor the last to see rodents desecrating the other offerings to the deity. That was, is, and will be a negligible incident to most of us. But, Mool Shankar's inquisitive mind triggered a quest for true knowledge; that thirst was quenched during the learning period as a devoted student of Guru Virjānand jī. Most of the laws of modern science, inventions, etc. result from observations of small occurrences in nature, also - negligible events to most of us, but significant leaps in improving the material aspect of life.

The teachings, writings and works of Maharshi Svāmī Dayānand Saraswatī infused a new drive to improve the physical, spiritual and social conditions of mankind, and left indelible imprints on humanity – amongst others, the right to self-rule, independence; education for all; equal rights, do away with discrimination against women, the downtrodden; promote meritocracy and competences, and discard lineage or pedigree-based privileges.

In the context of MahāShivrātri and Rishi Bodh, the following is a humble attempt to check our practices and be more mindful - thus, be empowered to awaken our third eye, attain *bodh* and be truly spiritual in our day-to-day life.

Cleaning of temples, houses and prayer rooms, having special baths, fasting, removing shoes and sandals before stepping into where puja or havan is to be performed.

Questions:

- ⇒ Have we shed off the dirt out from mind and heart (centers of mental and emotional activities)?
- ⇒ Are we ever watchful of our foods and drinks (*āhār*), our thoughts (*vichār*), and our conduct (*vyavahār*)?
- ⇒ Have we tossed out the duplicity in our life?
- ⇒ Are there any skeletons in the cupboard - a glowing public life coupled with hidden facets of a so-called 'private' life?

Pre-prayer preparations include aligning our thoughts (*manasā*), speech (*vāchā*) and physical actions (*karmanā*) on the path of righteous living (*dharma*).

Ringling of the bell: The clapper is always fixed inside the bell, which rings when it strikes the inner edge of the bell, it rings. If fixed on the outside it produces an odd sound with little or no resonance.

Question: Have we internalized & aligned ourselves with the inner voice (the divine guidance)?

⇒ *Mana* or *antakaran*, the subtle faculty is to the senses what the clapper is to the edge of the bell; self-control confers upon us a radiating personality, like the sound and vibrations from a ringing bell.

The soul (*ātmā*) is to the subtle faculty of the mind (*mana*) what the jockey is to horse-riding; the key to happiness is in our hands.

Abhisheka: Using various substances

Question: What does each of them symbolize?

⇒ Milk and ghee are *sātvic* and signify purity and piousness; Yogurt – prosperity; Honey – sweet speech; Sugar – happiness; Water – purity; Turmeric – health promoting; Bilva or Bael leaves – refreshing coolness; Vermillion – liveliness; Chandan (sandal paste) – fragrance; Flowers – scent & beauty; Rice, food grains & sweets – abundance of means, generosity & no extravagance; and vibhuti (ash) reminds us of the final state of our body.

Our thoughts, speech and physical actions need fine-tuning, to reflect the above characteristics.

Ārtee

Question: Are our karmas (actions) as fragrant as the camphor, dhoop, incense lit for ārtee? We need to always be pure and humane. Others will feel the fragrance of our personality by our mere presence ...nobody needs to blow the trumpet.

Darshan

Question: Standing with folded hands, why to the eyes close without any effort?

⇒ Eeshvar (God) is simply conveying a silent message ...in a subtle way:

(i) *Omnipresent* (सर्वव्यापक - Sarvavyāpak), *I am present within and all around you;* (ii) *Omniscient* (सर्वज्ञ - Sarvajna), *I have perfect knowledgeable of all your actions - mental, vocal and physical;* (iii) *All-merciful* (दयालु - Dayālu), *I am always guiding you towards righteous thoughts and deeds, but you are free to choose your way;* and (iv) *All-just* (न्यायकारी - Nyāyakāree), *I confer upon each living being the rewards of good karma (deeds) and the penalties for negative karma in due time.*

Therefore, we need to be prudent and exercise restraint in our thoughts, words & physical actions.

Āchamana (sipping of water) & Anga sparsha (touching of various parts of our body with water) during Havan

Question: What does water represent?

⇒ *Cool and refreshing:* Water quenches our thirst.

- ⇒ *Life-sustaining*: Human life is aquatic during the 9 months gestation period. The human body is 70% water. It is essential to agriculture, food production and to maintain the ecological balance of our planet – earth.
- ⇒ *Purifying*: Water is extensively used as a cleansing agent – bath, laundry, etc.
- ⇒ *Transformation*: Boiled rice, cooked bread cannot be reversed to the original state.
- ⇒ *Bonding*: Cement and other aggregates in the construction industry. Water from two vessels mixed in a third one cannot be segregated back.
- ⇒ *Peace*: Ripples arise when a stone is thrown in a pond, but after a while the surface becomes calm.

Our thoughts, speech and physical actions need fine-tuning, to reflect the above characteristics.

Mantra chanting

Mindful of the chanting of mantras, the sound and vibrations promotes internalisation – silencing of the mental and emotional activities, prompting us to be mindful of the meaning of the mantras ...sound therapy.

Lighting of lamp

Physical light dispels darkness. Likewise we need to put up all our efforts to move away from the darkness of ignorance towards the light of knowledge.

Some understanding of the relationships between the lamp, the ghee and the wick induces us to lead a balanced life: (i) The lamp serves as a vessel holding the ghee; (ii) Ghee is *sattvic* – stimulates purity, harmony, balance, energy, is wholesome, beneficial, fragrant, etc.; and (iv) The wick burns when it stays immersed in the ghee with a part outside, submerged the flame extinguishes.

Agnyādān

Fire produces heat through combustion. The heat sustains evaporation and sublimation of the ghee and *samagree* (mixture of medicinal, fragrant, sweet and nutritious herbs and substances) disseminating them as micro particles ...*aromatherapy*. The various colours of the flames are beneficial ...*chromatherapy*. The flames from the fire always move upwards, teaching us that our thoughts, speech and deeds should always prompt us and others to rise in life.

Samidhādān

The wood sticks placed in the fire pot (*havan kund*) integration themselves with the fire and become part and parcel of the fire (*agni-svarup*). It prompts to be virtuous (*dharmic*) in all aspects of life. The upward movement (*gati*) of the flames is also symbolises upwards movement in life through acquisition of both worldly and spiritual knowledge (*jnana*), progress (*gamana*) and realization of the objectives of human life (*prāpti*).

Oblations (*ahuti*) of Ghee & Samagree

Ghee and sāmāgree, offered as oblations to the fire. In a well-lit fire and aerated place, part of these ingredients are burnt to produce energy, and most of them evaporate and sublimate as vapors and micro particles, spreading multi-fold their sātvic aspects.

A common example of this characteristic of fire is the aroma in the kitchen when spices are added to hot oil while cooking; the pungent smell spreading over a large area when a dried chili is put into fire; and the foul-smell from burning garbage. Virtue is the fragrance of our personality and immorality stinks.

Āshirvād (blessings)

We have a keen desire to seek the grace of Eeshvar (God) and blessings from elderly and knowledgeable persons. Blessings work marvels only when we lead a righteous life. So, we need to put up maximum physical and mental efforts and shun laziness.

Shānti pātha

While reciting the hymn for universal peace, we need to (i) connect each shanti with the corresponding word, (ii) feel each of the components of the Creation as a source of peace and (iii) pledge to be peaceful to them, i.e. respect nature and the laws of nature (the Creation) ...“**do to others as you would like them do to you**”. Then-and-only-then , the luminous bodies (*dyau*), space (*antariksham*), earth (*prithivee*), water (*āpah*), seasonal & annual plants (*oshadhayah*), perennial vegetation (*vanaspataya*); learned persons (*vishve-deva*) universe (*brahma*), all objects (*sarvam*) shall continuously (*eva*) bestow (*edhi*) peace (*shānti*) upon us (*sāmā*).

We need to be change agents, first change ourselves from within, and ...the world will change for us. Internal upgrade always yields enhanced performance, a better existence. *Attentive to small events, moving ahead of these events, fine-tuning the discerning faculty of our mind, and coherence in thoughts, speech and deeds result in ...the awakening of the third eye ...Bodh.*

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